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ABSTRACT

In recent years, educators and policymakers have been concerned with the growing need to consider implementation and maintenance of multicultural or cross-cultural educational programs in elementary and secondary schools. This article discusses the need for multicultural education and the means by which school boards can begin to implement, evaluate, or revise such programs. Common misconceptions about multicultural education programs are first addressed, followed by a description of multicultural education that works. The Prospect Middle School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is described next as a model for establishing a multicultural center. Suggestions are offered to school boards for developing curriculum guidelines and evaluating program outcomes. In conclusion, the goals of policies, programs, and curricula should be to help students learn, think, and behave in ways that foster democracy and mutual respect. This is the goal of American education and the charge society gives to local school boards. (LMI)

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Multiculturalism: Myths and Realities

by Patricia G. Lloyd

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Multiculturalism: Myths and Realities

by Patricia G. Lloyd

A great deal of information has been published over the last few years about the need for multicultural programs in all levels of education. In particular, educators and policymakers have been concerned with the growing need to consider implementation and maintenance of multicultural or cross-cultural educational programs in elementary and secondary schools. The following article will present a discussion of the need for multicultural education and the means by which school boards can begin to implement programs or to evaluate and revise current programs.

Multiculturalism tends to be a very provocative term that is used in many contexts with many meanings, depending on the perspective of the person speaking about it and one's level of knowledge about and sensitivity to the issue. Indeed, it may have a positive meaning for some and a highly negative connotation for others.

The United States is a multicultural society composed of diverse groups of people who possess many common traits, such as a respect for freedom and democracy and the pursuit of happiness, the safety and well being of families, personal success and the success of our children, and appreciation of the unique aspects of our various cultural backgrounds including customs, styles of dress, religious beliefs, values, tenets and even body language.

Since schools are reflective of society, we need to remind ourselves that our schools are composed of diverse student bodies with many cultures represented in virtually every classroom. As the demographics of society and, therefore, schools continue to experience systemic change, the challenges of those changes must be met if America is to compete and succeed in the global marketplace.

Traditional pedagogical considerations will not prepare our children for the global village of the next millennium. With the increased importance of international communication, international trade and international business relationships to the growth of the U.S. economy, we must instill the knowledge of cultural sensitivity and understanding in our students if we hope to eliminate the prejudice, ethnocentrism and racial and ethnic conflicts that are prevalent in our society and the world's societies today.

Cultural pluralism exists now in many societies; therefore, we can no longer view diversity as a threat. It is time to build on our cultural differences if we are to realize a viable economic, political and environmental future. Today's students must learn to live and work comfortably and productively with each other even if another's beliefs and world views differ from their own, and it is our responsibility, as education's advocates and leaders, to teach them how.

Myths and misconceptions exist concerning most vital issues, and multiculturalism is no exception. The remainder of this article will consider some of the more harmful misconceptions surrounding multicultural education, outline program possibilities and introduce an example of a school that has found a viable means of implementing intercultural pedagogical programs into its curriculum.

The key to success in multicultural education is the same as in all education programs:

If we keep in mind the goals of increasing graduation rates, improving student skills and achievement, developing knowledge and a lifelong interest in acquiring knowledge, improving performance on standardized tests and expanding cultural frontiers, we will have the best chance of providing all students with the skills necessary to succeed.

Assessing Your Cultural Awareness

We know that in order to understand others, we must first understand our-

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selves. By examining our own culture, we can begin to become more sensitive to other cultures and peoples. Each culture is a combination of societal and individual influences, including family, religion, customs, traditions, beliefs, values, community structure and educational environment. A first step in developing cultural awareness is recognizing our own biases and increasing our self awareness. Here are a few questions with which to begin to test yourself about your cultural sensitivity:

1. Do you feel that your culture has something to offer to others? If so, what are its unique c[illegible]es?
2. Do you sometimes view people from other cultures as less capable because they cannot express themselves clearly in your language or do not share your cultural views?
3. How would you address a letter to a Chinese gentlemen named Lee Wong Ping? (Answer: Dear Mr. Lee. Chinese names list the surname first and given names second.) If you were introduced to Mr. Jose Garcia Mendoza how would you address him? (Answer: Mr. Garcia. In Spanish-speaking countries, names are usually a combination of the father's and mother's names, however, only the father's name is used in conversation.) Why does it matter if you are concerned about names and forms of address in other cultures?
4. Are you uncomfortable when speaking with someone from an Asian culture who will not make eye contact with you? Do you know why Asians look away? (Answer: In some Asian cultures people are taught to look down as a sign of respect.)

If we expect administrators and teachers to promote the multicultural programs that will improve school environments in their districts, then we, as education policy makers, must begin by developing our own sensitivity to and appreciation of others' beliefs and behaviors. As leaders, school board members need to set the example.

Misconceptions

Misconceptions about multicultural programs can be particularly detrimental if they cause the issues to become divided along individual cultural lines (i.e., Western Culture versus Afrocentric Culture) rather than working to include several cultures in a comprehensive curriculum. The following are some of the most prevalent misconceptions about multicultural education:

1. *The curriculum will be diluted and only allow for a superficial study of cultures.* In fact, multicultural studies expand students' cultural consciousness by exposing them to different points of view, different ways of doing things, different ways of expressing ourselves. The more inclusive a curriculum can be, the broader a student's knowledge and understanding is likely to be.
2. *Idealistic and ethnic activists dominate cultural policy, and anti-western political indoctrination permeates multiculturalism.* It is true that there are vociferous pressure groups rallying for change in the curriculum and in text books; however, we must remember that the goal is to achieve change based on a balance among cultural studies for all students and not to focus solely on one or two ethnic groups. A broad multicultural curriculum tends to negate the influence of any one group.
3. *The particularist approach to teaching culture is preferable to the pluralistic approach.* Particularists believe in the concept of ethnic studies, where children learn to identify with their own ancestors' culture and history. This serves to divide society into racial or ethnic groups and identify oppressors, victims, and aggressors. It promotes a sense of alienation instead of a sense of belonging to a larger society composed of many diverse cultures, none of which is singled out as good or bad. Pluralism, on the other hand, encourages the development of critical thinking skills about cultural diversity and the view that we are all citizens of America and the world. A part of the inevitable change in the 21st century is acceptance of the fact that we are all interactive and interdependent.
4. *Multicultural education is not needed if the student body is homogeneous.* The premise here is that multicultural education is an ethic- or minority-specific issue. This premise defeats, and indeed ignores, the theory of

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multiculturalism as a lifelong pursuit of learning and advancing understanding and mutual respect, of responsibility and of a shared interest in issues that affect society. Because the demographics of the world are changing, children can no longer live in a cloistered environment. All students, whether they live in urban, suburban, rural or the new (and somewhat trendy) exurban (meaning beyond the suburbs, but not rural) communities, need to be aware of different cultures and their impacts on the interpersonal, commercial and educational facets of their lives. *All* students, regardless of gender, or racial/ ethnic background, need to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge needed to function effectively in the changing U.S. population.

5. *By instituting a short-term activity associated with a culture or racial group, for example, Black History Month or Hispanic Week, schools can foster a multicultural approach.* This may sound good but it is not enough! Students need year-round education in cultural awareness, not flash-in-the-pan activities. Although these types of activities can be fun and informative and should not be rejected, they need to be supplemented with more pedagogy and include exposure to more than one or two other cultures. We are, as Americans, so much more than our color spectrum indicates. We are, despite our own often vociferous self-criticism, the world's best example of an amalgamation of cultures, regions, mores and individual freedom.

Indeed, much of our strength comes from our reaction to attitudes and behaviors that would deny opportunity and equality. A recent example has been provided by a high school principal who called a mixed-race child a "mistake" and who, with his school board supporters, acted to prevent mixed race couples from attending the high school prom in their school district. The response to these actions has been uniquely American: wide public acknowledgement of the incident, outrage from fair-minded citizens, the resignation in protest of one member of the school board and attendance strikes by students, and renewed discussion of the need to teach tolerance and understanding of all people.

This hurtful occurrence has reminded us of the challenge that faces all Americans, perhaps especially those of us who are educators and education policy makers: to be ever vigilant in providing opportunity and promoting equity for all of our children.

In the Real World: Examples of Multicultural Education That Works

Training school staff in respecting cultural diversity is the first step in integrating a multicultural curriculum. Teachers want and need to understand how to deal with cultural differences in order to teach effectively and maintain respect and discipline in their classrooms.

Many school systems now offer training seminars and classes that train teachers to recognize and respect students' varied backgrounds. The courses vary depending on budgets. In Virginia and Maryland, for example, inservice training in multicultural education ranges from a comprehensive 45 hours of class time to a 15-hour course available on a selective basis.

It is important to remember that instruction can be accomplished on a low budget. In fact, most teachers are experienced in collecting information on their own and sharing it with others. However, as greater demands are placed on teachers to teach children who have greatly diverse learning styles, ability levels and attitudes, teacher training becomes even more essential.

Although we commonly group people into one of six geocultural groups — African, American Indian, Asian, European, Hispanic or Pacific Islander — we must also recognize that many cultural subgroups exist within these generic groupings. Good inservice training can clarify the complexities and provide teachers with greater confidence in handling all students.

To foster appreciation, respect and tolerance for people of all cultural backgrounds, discussions, readings and projects involving history, social studies, mathematics and science, i.e., integrated curricula, are of the utmost importance. By integrating multicultural ideas into all subjects, we can give students the opportunity to begin to explore the world around them from perspectives other than their own.

Although history and social studies programs have grown to include African/American and/or Hispanic studies, this is simply not enough. While these types of programs are a beginning and are to be applauded, they must be expanded to recognize the contributions and struggles of more than two or three geocultural groups.

Some schools have instituted programs based on multiculturalism in literature, music and the arts. Ethnic literature studies are a means to add diversity when the majority of texts are not multiculturally inclusive. Ethnic arts and music studies portray history and culture in an interesting and identifiable form for children. They teach about lifestyles, interests, leisure time, innovations, human relationships, contributions to society and, through stories and music, demonstrate how peoples of the world have passed their cultural history and heritage down from one generation to the next.

A study of the arts can bring to light different points of view, allowing students to gain a stronger sense of self

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and an increased understanding of other peoples. An exploration of the rich cultural history of the world and, more immediately, the United States — from folk art to fine art — can illustrate art as a reflection of culture to children and adults alike.

A Model for Establishing a Multicultural Center: The Prospect Middle School

Prospect Middle School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, established a multi-cultural center in response to recognition of the need to enhance the educational and learning needs of children living in a diverse society. Robert Pipkin and Denise Yates, both of the Pittsburgh public school system, have written an article describing the school's interest in the development and implementation of a multicultural program. The article was entitled "Multicultural Education: A Middle School's Approach to Preparing Tomorrow's Leaders." (*ERS Spectrum*, Fall 1992, Vol.10)

In their report, Pipkin and Yates describe the five goals and six steps ("strands") that the Pittsburgh School District undertook. The district's initial agreement to be open and direct in addressing both problems and solutions was central to their success.

In the first stage, The Pittsburgh school board, superintendent and representatives from area Fortune 500 companies participated in discussions about the changing dynamics of the country and, specifically, their region. Racism and bigotry were noted as problems, as well as the inability of the public school system to effectively educate minorities. Business leaders expressed their concern that under the current system, the quantity and quality of highly trained people necessary for industry in the future would not be met.

School district staff defined the following five goals as central to a multicultural curriculum:

- giving students a more balanced version of history;
- enhancing personal development and interpersonal relations of the students (principally focusing on the students' own racial/ethnic identities, self-esteem, and intergroup relations);
- using fair and effective approaches to individual differences in learning styles that are believed to be linked to cultural influences;
- achieving multicultural representation in the total school environment by hiring a more culturally diverse staff; and
- providing equal learning opportunities for children in all cultural groups.

Prospect instituted a full-fledged multicultural program, including the addition of multicultural facets throughout the curriculum — in history and social studies, reading, literature, language arts, science and fine arts. Prospect thus effectively created an environment in which Pipkin and Yates state that "students accept each other and the faculty accepts them."

Prospect also used "six strands" to promote multicultural teaching methods and ideals. The six, as stated by Pipkin and Yates, are as follows:

- The cognitive learning and teaching styles strand is a response to research showing that students generally learn better when teaching styles are matched with the preferred learning style. By matching teaching and learning styles, Prospect has introduced redesigned classrooms, multisensory instructional packages, and education on the cross-cultural learning styles of various cultural groups.
- The conflict resolution strand realizes that conflict — whether viewed positively or negatively — is not only inevitable and pervasive, but also is a potentially valuable element in daily interpersonal transactions. Managing and resolving conflict in a positive manner stimulates students' creativity and introduces a vehicle for social change and personal growth. Prospect has implemented both a conflict resolution curriculum that provides insight into mastery of conflict resolution skills, and a student mediation center that emphasizes student responsibility by altering student behavior rather than by punishment.
- The goals of the cooperative learning strand are two-fold: to prepare children for adult societal roles in which they work together cooperatively in order to achieve a common goal; and to facilitate the development of positive intergroup relations within newly desegregated classrooms. This strand's intended outcomes are increased academic achievement, greater self-esteem, mutual respect for different ethnic groups or races, and more positive intergroup relations. Students at Prospect learn to identify the differences between competitive and cooperative environments, group activity versus cooperative learning, and individual versus group learning.
- The cultural awareness strand of the multicultural curriculum provides students with viable experiences that enhance their appreciation and knowledge of their cultural heritage. Students are exposed to real-world experiences through adult role models, parents and community volunteers, who lead activities and present information on their own life experiences. These experiences are designed to help students make intelligent decisions about the future, thus increasing the probability that they will become constructive adult citizens.
- The curriculum infusion strand progressively educates students in developing a positive sense of

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self-identity, self-awareness, and pride in their own racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage, all of which contribute to their abilities to be productive members of U.S. society. Similarities and differences between various cultural groups are recognized and understood through the introduction of revised curricula that focus on multicultural themes, issues, teaching strategies, learning styles, and classroom organization.

- The final strand is the establishment of parental and community involvement in the school's curriculum. Responding to studies that suggest meaningful parental involvement positively affects both the academic achievement and the racial attitudes of children, Prospect's multicultural program encourages teachers and parents to become partners in the effort to maximize their children's potential. By providing opportunities for parents to volunteer in non-traditional school activities, Prospect has earned the respect of the majority of parents. Instead of running bake sales or monitoring field trips, parents now help to plan workshops and assist in the interview process for new staff. Additionally, Prospect has taken steps to establish new programs and strengthen existing cooperative efforts between schools and community centers.

Things School Boards Should Consider When Developing Guidelines for Curriculum

1. Collect the demographic data on your district and keep in mind the demographic changes projected for the 21st century. For example, in 1992, white males comprised 42 percent of the work force and white females made up 35 percent, but new entrants in this category are expected to decline. By the year 2005, new white male entrants will comprise 31 percent, white women entrants 34 percent, and some suggest that by the year 2020, only 15 percent of new entrants to the workforce in the U.S. will be white males. Non-white entrants to the work force in 2005 are projected as follows:

Black non Hispanic	12%
Hispanic	15%
Asian/Other	8%

These numbers are expected to increase throughout the next century. This is exemplified by the projection that by the year 2020, 79 percent of the total increase in population will be composed of minority group members. (U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Statistics)

2. Conduct research on the cultural groups serviced by your school and their needs.

3. Look at the composition of your community and its relationship to the composition of your schools. Work to make your board, teachers and management staff resemble the demographics of your district.

4. Involve diverse members of society in school activities.

5. Implement a community-wide framework for decision making on local and regional issues.

6. Make sure that equity and excellence are primary goals in your district's education vision and plan.

7. Introduce multicultural activities/studies in an interdisciplinary curriculum.

8. Represent many cultures in your curriculum; do not limit cultural education to only those cultures present in your school district.

9. Strive to make your schools places where children of all cultures feel comfortable and accepted, while increasing the knowledge and sensitivity of all students.

Evaluation of Multicultural Programs

Every good plan, every successful program includes an assessment element that allows for consideration of what was intended and what was achieved, as well as for revision. At a minimum, you will want to consider the following:

1. Survey parents, students and staff about their perceptions of the success of programs and measure changes in attitudes towards racial/cultural relations.

2. Ask local experts and local business persons to evaluate your programs and provide information and recommendations to help improve your programs, policies and strategies.

3. Ask for data that address the relevant questions such as: Have student achievement and awareness improved? Are cultural conflicts more manageable and/or less frequent?

The goals of policies, programs and curricula should be to help students learn, think and behave in ways that foster democracy and mutual respect. Students should be taught to strive to be productive members of a society in which all individuals/groups are treated fairly and all are truly a part of the cultural fabric of the nation. This is the goal of American education and the charge society gives to local school board members. ■